

life of Medicare by over 30 years. Medicare was supposed to go broke last year when I took office.

It provides, believe it or not, tax cuts—affordable tax cuts—to help people send their kids to college, pay for long-term care for the elderly and disabled—a big deal—pay for child care, pay for retirement savings, allow people between the ages of 55 and 65 to buy into Medicare and give them a tax benefit to do so, because so many of them have lost their insurance, and provide marriage penalty tax relief. And believe it or not, our plan only costs one-fourth as much as theirs does, but it would provide more benefits to 80 percent of the people.

So there is a way to have a tax cut here and have the money to pay for the Medicare prescription drug program, to lengthen the life of Medicare and Social Security, to invest in the education of our children. And believe it or not, I still leave a lot of this projected surplus alone, in my budget, in case it doesn't materialize, or in case it does materialize, the next President and the next Congress can make a judgment about what to do with it. I just don't believe in spending all this money before it comes in. We've tried it before, and it didn't work out too well.

So I hope that all of you will raise your voices. This is not a partisan political issue in America. When you go to the pharmacist to fill a prescription, nobody asks you whether you voted Republican or Democrat for the last 40 years. Nobody asks whether you vote at all. You're just a person, and you need the medicine. It should not be a partisan political issue in Washington. We have the money. We can do it, provide a tax cut, invest in our children, and still get the country out of debt. All we have to do is decide what our priorities are, how much we care about it, how much people like the people on this

stage and in this room matter to us, and what kind of America we want to live in.

So I ask you all, because it's not a partisan issue out here, do what you can with your Senators and your Representatives. Raise your voices. Tell them it shouldn't be a partisan issue in Washington. You've got a lot of lives depending on it. And it's only going to become more and more important.

You know, we're on the verge of breakthroughs for Parkinson's, for various kinds of cancers, with the human genome project, which I'm sure you read about. We've now sequenced the human gene in its entirety. It won't be long; in the next 10 years, it's going to take your breath away what we learn how to correct in terms of human health problems.

I believe that these young children here will, themselves, have children that will have a life expectancy at birth in excess of 90 years. But if we want to do this—this is a high-class problem—I believe people with disabilities will find ways to remedy a lot of the disabilities, and they will be able to live longer and better lives and have more options. But all of that will require us to rely more heavily on medicine—not less, more.

We have put this off long enough. We finally have the money to do it. And I think, as a country, we're morally obligated to do it. So I ask you to raise your voices. Stick with us. Let's keep working on it until we get it done.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at noon in the activity room. In his remarks, he referred to Paul Herrera, president, Barksdale Center Golden Age Club; Bill Nelson, Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate in Florida; Mayor Dick A. Greco of Tampa; senior citizen Sylvia Kessler, who introduced the President; and Ed McMahon, Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes spokesperson.

Remarks at a Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Luncheon in Tampa

July 31, 2000

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your warm welcome, and I want to thank Bill Nelson for his introduction. It's

amazing how, if you've sort of got one leg in the political grave, people think you're doing

a better job. [Laughter] Let me say how delighted I am to be here.

I remember well the first time I came to a fundraiser in Tampa in 1992—early, early, early, early. Some of you were there then. And I particularly appreciate it because at that time, my mother was the only voting American who thought I could win. [Laughter] And a lot of things have happened in the last 8 years and some odd months, and I have been very honored to serve. And I thank you all for coming today.

I first want to acknowledge Congressman Jim Davis. He's doing a wonderful job for you in the House, and he's a real treasure. He's been a standup guy. And for someone without a lot of seniority, he has both had a big impact, and he's been willing to cast brave votes, and I'm very grateful to him. And even though the light is blinding my weakening eyes, I think I see Sam Gibbons out there. And I thank you, sir.

I want to thank Mayor Greco for his warm welcome. I have loved my visits with him here. I'm like Jim; I like to see a person who likes his job. If there's anything I can't stand it's to hear somebody in public office complain. You know, nobody makes us take these jobs. You've got to work like crazy to get them, and as soon as you give one up, somebody else wants it. [Laughter] So he never made any pretense of the fact that he loves this city, and he loves his job, and he's been a dream to work with.

I'd like to thank Ben Hill Griffin and Chris Hoyer and Jim Wilkes for chairing this event and for harassing the rest of you to give money to it. [Laughter] I'd like to thank Buddy MacKay for coming over here with me today and for the brilliant job he's doing as our Envoy to the Americas, and the leadership that he showed in passing our trade bill on the Caribbean Basin earlier this year. We can be very proud of that.

I thank the other people here who are running for Congress. We just need five more seats to win the House, and maybe we saw a couple of them here today. And I thank Bob Poe for chairing the Democratic Party here. This is going to be a good State, I think, for us in November if we do the right things.

Most important of all, though, I want to say that I'm honored to be here for Bill Nelson. I've known Bill for, I don't know, years and years and years, a long time. And he and Grace have been friends of Hillary and mine for years. They and their children came to the White

House and stayed with us one night. And we stayed up later than we should have, talking. And we've had the opportunity over the years at various encounters to get to know one another, and I think the world of both of them. And I think that we need more people like them in Washington, people who are civil and decent and reasonable and caring, and not just in election season, not just as a part of a marketing strategy but because they think it's the right thing to do. And he's been an absolutely superb insurance commissioner, and he would be a superb United States Senator.

Let me say to all of you, it has been the great—obviously—the great honor of my life to serve as President. I can't believe all the time that's passed. When I ran for President, I did so against all the odds, when no one thought I could win, because I believed the country was going in the wrong direction and was coming apart when it ought to be coming together. And I thought that the Washington political system was never going to serve America well unless it got shaken up and changed.

And if we have had some measure of success up there, I think in no small degree it's because Al Gore and I went up there with a set of ideas for specific things we wanted to do, rooted in the values of creating opportunity for every responsible American and creating a community in which all Americans feel a part, in a world where we're still the leading force for peace and freedom and prosperity.

Now, even though we faced intense partisan opposition at almost every turn of the road, it turned out the ideas worked pretty well for America. You know, when I passed the economic plan in 1993, without a vote to spare, only Democrats voting for it, to bring the deficit down, Al Gore breaking the tie vote in the Senate. As he says, his record since we've been there is a lot better than mine; whenever he votes, we win. [Laughter]

I remember how our friends in the Republican Party said, oh, it would be the end of civilization as we knew it. My terrible, terrible economic program was going to bankrupt the country. It was going to weaken the economy. We'd have a terrible recession. The deficit would get worse. This was from a crowd that had quadrupled the debt of the country in 12 years, telling me how bad I was. And then, lo and behold, it didn't work out the way they said it would.

By the time we got ready to pass the bipartisan balanced budget amendment in '97 all the hard work had been done. And we got more than two-thirds of both parties in both Houses to vote for that. And now we've had, as all of you know, the longest economic expansion in history. That's given us over 22 million new jobs and the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, and the highest homeownership in history, and greater social justice—lowest child poverty rate in 20 years, lowest minority unemployment rate ever recorded, the lowest female unemployment rate in 40 years, the lowest rate of single-parent household poverty in 46 years. So we're moving in the right direction. This thing is going as it should.

But the big question in this election is, what do we propose to do with our prosperity? That is the big issue. And I think that, as Bill Nelson goes out across this State between now and November, whether he wins or not—and I believe he will—depends in no small measure on what people believe the election's about. You might ask yourself just quietly, what do you think it's about? The only trouble we've got in this election right now, anywhere in America, is the confusion that exists about what the differences are between the candidates for President, Senate, Congress, and the two parties.

There was a big story in one of our major national newspapers the other day; the American people are not sure there's much difference in economic policy. A big story in one of the other newspapers about 4 days ago about an interview system with a lot of suburban women who wanted more gun safety legislation had no earthly idea what the difference between the two candidates was.

And I say that because I think there are three things you need to know about this election. One is, it's a huge, profoundly important election, just as important as the election in 1992. Why? Because what a country does with its prosperity is just as stern a test of its judgment, its values, and its character as what it does with adversity. You didn't have to be a genius to know we had to do something different in '92.

I'll never forget when Hillary gave me that little saying that somebody gave us that said the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. *[Laughter]* So you didn't have to be a genius to figure out we had to change.

So now we are at the time in our history, maybe unique in our history, when we had this unique combination of enormous economic prosperity, improving social progress, welfare rolls cut in half, crime at a 25-year low, teen pregnancy down, every social indicator going in the right direction. And we don't have a domestic crisis or a foreign threat sufficiently grave to distract us. What are we going to do about it? That's a big issue.

The second thing you need to know about the election is that there are big differences. And the decisions the voters make in all these races will have significant consequences in how we live our lives and what we do with our prosperity and what kind of people we are.

And then the third thing you need to know is that in this election year only the Democrats want you to know what the differences are—*[laughter]*—which is a pretty good indicator of who you ought to vote for.

Now, what do I mean by that? Well, on our side, led by Vice President Gore, we've got a group of men and women who want to keep our prosperity going by getting this country out of debt, continuing to invest in education and in the future of our economy, having affordable tax cuts, and providing drug coverage for our seniors on Medicare.

On their side, their main argument, as near as I can tell is, "We want to be inclusive and compassionate and spend the whole surplus on tax cuts, but be nice about it while we're doing it." And actually, their argument is easier to sell than ours. Their argument is, "Hey, this is your money. We're going to give it back to you. Wouldn't you like to have it?"

Now, then there are all these issues they don't talk about. So what I would like to tell you is what I honestly believe the differences are because I want you to share them with your friends and neighbors who would never come here. But it's very important. No point in having an election if the people don't know what the differences are and don't understand what the consequences are. And I'll just start with the economy.

Their side says, "We've got this big projected surplus, and we're going to give it back to you in tax cuts." And, as I said earlier today, every one of these tax cuts sounds good. And they're doing it—they're smarter this year—this year's tax cut—last year was just one big, omnibus

bill. This year they're doing it salami style, passing a little along so they all sound good. But when you add them all up, and especially you put the new ones they're committing to in Philadelphia, it's the entire proposed surplus. So every one of them looks good, but it's kind of like going to a cafeteria. Every time I go to a cafeteria, everything I see looks good. But if I eat it all, I'll get sick. Think about it.

So that's their position. Their economic policy is, "Let's do what we did before, Who cares if we go back to deficits?" And they'll spend it all on tax cuts before they even keep their own spending promises. Never mind what emergencies come up. Our position is different. It is, "Hey, let's remember how we got to this dance today. We got here by getting rid of this deficit, getting interest rates down, getting it where people could invest and grow the economy. So let's keep paying down the debt, save some money back to invest in education and to lengthen the life of Medicare and Social Security, so when the baby boomers retire they don't bankrupt their kids, and provide a prescription drug benefit for seniors on Medicare. Let's have a tax cut and focus it on paying for long-term care, for college, for child care, helping working people with a lot of kids, and helping people with their retirement. Ours costs 25 percent of what theirs does and does way more good for 80 percent of the people."

And then we say, "Then let's save several hundred billion dollars of this projected surplus and let the next President and the next Congress decide what to do over the next several years as we see whether the money comes in." Now, this—I can hardly tell you how important this is.

We've worked really hard to get this country turned around, to get this economy going. And their position is, "Let's spend all the projected surplus." Did you ever get one of those letters in the mail from Ed McMahon, you know, from the Publishers Clearing House? "You may have won \$10 million." [Laughter] Did you go out and spend that \$10 million the next day? [Laughter] If you did, you should support them in this election. [Laughter] But if you didn't, you'd better stick with us. If you want to live like a Republican, you've got to vote for the Democrats this year. [Laughter] This is important. This is a big deal.

Now, the second issue, education—what's our program? Our program is that we should take

the limited Federal dollars we have and spend it on more teachers in the classrooms, training those teachers better, modernizing and repairing schools—because you know here in Florida how many schools you have—right here in Tampa, I've been to a school, a high school right here in Tampa, just full of housetrailer behind, in back. We need to help deal with this issue.

We want to help people go to college. And we want to say to schools all over America, school districts, "You've got to turn these schools around or shut them down. No more failing schools."

Now, here's the good news: Student performance is going up. All over America failing schools are turning around. I was in Spanish Harlem in New York City the other day, in a school that 2 years ago had 80 percent of its kids—listen to this, now—80 percent doing English and math below grade level—2 years ago. Today, 74 percent of them are doing English and math at or above grade level, in 2 years.

I've been in schools in Columbus, Ohio, and rural Kentucky, all over America, that were failing that are turned around, without regard to the racial or economic backgrounds of the kids in the school. We know how to do it. That's our position.

Their position is, the Federal money investment in education should be spent on block grants and vouchers. I think we're right. You have to decide. But we have some evidence that our plan works. And in the economy, we've sure got all the evidence we need. All you've got to do—we tried it their way for 12 years and our way for 8 years. Compare our 8 years to their 12 and make up your mind.

In crime, let's talk about that. Our position is, more police on the street, do more to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and kids. And they said when I signed the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban—they terrified all these hunters and said I was going to take their guns away and how awful it was. I heard all that stuff all over America. It's one of the reasons we lost the House in 1994. When I went back to New Hampshire in 1996, where they beat one of those Congressmen, I said, "You know, you guys beat your Democratic Congressman up here because he voted for my crime bill. And if a person in this audience"—and I got all these hunters together—I said, "If one of you missed a day in the deer woods, I want

you to vote against me, too, because he did it for me. But if you didn't miss a day in the deer woods, they didn't tell you the truth, and you need to get even." And our margin of victory in New Hampshire went up by 12 percent in 4 years. [Laughter]

This country has a lower crime rate than we've had in 25 years. Gun crime has gone down by 35 percent. So what do we say? We say, "Let's put more police on the street in the high crime neighborhoods. Let's close the gun show loophole in the background check law"—which you voted to do in Florida, overwhelmingly—"have mandatory child safety locks, and stop importing these large capacity ammunition clips which allow the manufacturers to get around the assault weapons ban." That's what we say.

What do they say? Throw the book at anybody that violates the law and have more people carrying concealed weapons, even in church. Now, you have to decide which side you agree with. But it's not like you don't have any evidence here. We tried it our way, and we tried it their way. And crime goes down more our way.

Now, the third thing I would like to say something about is health care. I said we're for adding a voluntary prescription drug benefit to Medicare. They are for making people buy private insurance and subsidizing it for people up to 150 percent of the poverty line. The only problem with their program is, even the insurance companies say there is no way to have stand-alone health insurance for prescription drugs.

Nevada passed a program just like the ones the Republicans in Congress passed, and not a single, solitary insurance company would offer the drugs because it won't work, and they didn't want to participate in a fraud. Now, this is a huge deal in Florida, but it's a big deal all over America for the elderly, the disabled.

Our program is for the drug users; theirs is for the drug makers. It is not a complicated thing. You just have to decide how important this is and whether you're willing to pay the price of our seniors never getting it if you don't support the Democrats. And you need to go tell people in Florida we're for a Patients' Bill of Rights, and they're not.

Let's take the environment. I've worked real hard here on a program that would balance all the interests to save the Florida Everglades. I'm really proud of it. The Vice President worked

hard on it. We really have labored to try to support you in what you're doing in Florida. And we saved a lot of Yellowstone Park from a gold mine, and we set aside more land in perpetuity in the lower 48 States than any administration in history except those of the two Roosevelts. And we proved, I think, that you could have cleaner air, cleaner water, and safer food and still have a stronger economy, because we raised all the environmental standards. We just did it in a sensible way.

Now, what's their position? Their position will be to weaken that direction, to repeal—one specific commitment they've already made is to repeal my order setting aside 43 million roadless acres in the national forests. The Audubon Society says it's the most significant conservation move in the last 40 years. They say they'll get rid of it. And they'll allow oil drilling in some places where we haven't. And apparently, they're committed to weaker regulations on the chemical industry.

Now, I've done everything I could to create jobs and be pro-business. But I think we've got to be pro-environment and pro-business. And you just have to decide which side you want to be on and what you think the best thing is for America. And these are the kinds of questions people have to be asked.

The same thing is true with regard to one America. One of the things that I want to do is make sure that we're all going along for the ride here. We're for raising the minimum wage for people that can never afford to come to a dinner like this but may be serving it. I think it's unconscionable that it's still below what it was in 1982 in purchasing power terms when we've got 4 percent unemployment. It's just wrong. Nobody ought to work full-time for a living and have kids that are still below the poverty line. It's wrong. But they're not for it.

Now, they're sort of being quiet on it now because the last time they fought me on it 4 years ago, they said it would cost jobs, and we created 11 million jobs since we passed it. So they really don't have a justification anymore. They can't—they're kind of embarrassed to say they're not for it, but they're not for it yet. If we turn up the heat enough between now and election, they will get it. But it's a big difference.

We're for hate crimes legislation, and they're basically not for it. Oh, a few of them are, but the leadership is not, and the nominee is

not because it protects gays. Well, I think everybody ought to be protected from hate crimes, which is a crime, an assault on you just because of who you are. But you can decide whether you agree with that or not. But that's where we are.

And there will be a big impact on the courts. The next President will appoint two to four judges on the Supreme Court, and the Senate will have to decide whether to confirm them or reject them. This is a huge decision. Their nominee says his favorite judges are Justice Thomas and Justice Scalia, by far the most conservative judges on the Court. That's what he said. And so you have to decide, because there will be big consequences.

So if you just go back, here we are with this—a whole future before us, with all these opportunities out there, and you should be happy. We don't have to have one of these negative campaigns like we used to have for 20 years that were mostly brought to us by their side, trying to convince you that whoever their opponent was was just one step above a car thief. [Laughter] I recommend we just call timeout and say everybody running this year is a good, patriotic American. They are men and women who love their families and love their country and will do what they think is right, but they have honest disagreements. They disagree over economic policy and educational policy and health care policy and environmental policy and crime policy and civil rights policy, and what it means to be an American citizen and what kind of individual rights you should have as guaranteed by the Supreme Court. And we want to have a debate over that.

Now, their strategy is to blur all that. I'll be very surprised if you hear anybody say this week at their meeting what I just said to you, even though I have tried to be exceedingly faithful to the differences between the two parties. And their strategy is to talk about compassion and all. It's a brilliant strategy. It's a pretty package, and they're hoping if they wrap it tight enough, nobody will open it before Christmas. [Laughter]

And what we've got to do is try to make sure that the American people open the package in September and October, so they will know. I trust the American people. They almost always get it right. Otherwise, we wouldn't still be here after over 200 years. And if everybody understands exactly what the choices are and the Vice

President doesn't win or Bill Nelson doesn't win, we'd be all right about that. But the truth is, if everybody understands exactly what the choices are, Bill Nelson will be the next Senator; Al Gore will be the next President; we will win the House of Representatives. Why? Because our economic policies, our educational policies, our health care policies are right for the country. Because the idea of building one America, not just with words but with deeds, and giving everybody a chance to participate in this brilliant future of science and technology in this global economy is the right thing for the country and the right thing for our children's future. That's why.

I'm telling you, as much, as many good things that have happened in the last 8 years, believe me, all the great stuff is still out there. But there are big challenges. Look at Florida's school kids, how diverse they are. If you want this country to be where it ought to be, every one of them has got to be able to get a good education. We have to figure out how, when all us baby boomers retire and the average 65-year-old can look forward to living to be 83, we're going to manage that without bankrupting our kids and grandkids.

We have to figure out how to make the most of this scientific and technological revolution. One of the reasons I want Al Gore to be President, apart from my personal relationship with him, is that I have studied very hard the impacts of the information technology revolution, the impacts of the genome revolution, what's likely to happen over the next 10 years. It seems to me that you want somebody that can make the most of the computer revolution and still protect your financial and medical records and not let somebody get at them unless you say okay. It seems to me you want somebody who can help make the most of this scientific revolution without letting somebody deny you a job or promotion or raise or health insurance because of your little gene map. It seems to me we ought to have somebody in the White House that understands the future.

And I know we ought to have people in the Senate who have the values and the judgment and just the way of operating that Bill Nelson does. Believe me, I've done everything I could to turn this country around, and the only thing now we have to decide is, what is this election about? If people really say, this election is about what shall we do with this moment of prosperity,

how can we meet the big challenges and seize the big opportunities out there, Bill Nelson will be just fine.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:04 p.m. in the Audubon Ballroom at the Hyatt Regency

Westshore. In his remarks, he referred to Bill Nelson, Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate in Florida, and his wife, Grace; Mayor Dick A. Greco of Tampa; former Representative Sam M. Gibbons; Ben Hill Griffin III, Chris Hoyer, and Jim Wilkes, luncheon cohosts; and Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.

Interview With Kelly Ring of WTVT Television in Tampa July 31, 2000

Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit

Ms. Ring. First of all, let's talk about why you came, and that's Medicare. And you know—I mean, this is something that's been important to you for a long time—getting Medicare, part of the prescription drug program included in Medicare. Talk about why that is so important to have that.

The President. Well, Medicare is a program that's 35 years old, and it's been a godsend for 35 years for a lot of our seniors. But when it was established, most of medicine was about doctors and hospitals and very little about prescription drugs. Now, the average 65-year-old has a life expectancy of 82 or 83 years, the highest in the world for seniors. And more and more, people need these drugs to stay alive and also to stay healthy.

Over and above that, America has about 5 million people on disability who are eligible for Medicare, and they need the medicine even more. So what we have been saying is, "Look, we've got this surplus. We have the money. We should add a voluntary prescription drug benefit to Medicare, because we have, all over America, seniors who are choosing every week between food and medicine because they can't pay their medical bills and because there is no other viable way to give them the medicine they need."

So I proposed this program, and I told the American people how we can add a prescription drug benefit to Medicare, still have a family tax cut, still invest in education, and keep paying us out of debt. I think that it is so critical to provide for the elderly and disabled in America.

Ms. Ring. Do you think it will happen before you leave office?

The President. I just don't know. I think the problem is the Republicans in the Congress believe that the program might be too expensive, although it's not nearly as expensive as their combined tax cuts, and they want—they also want a private insurance plan. But the bill they passed is just like one that got passed in Nevada, and not a single insurance company would offer the drug coverage because they knew they couldn't offer it at an affordable price. So the plan they passed is unworkable.

Now, what's really going on here is that the pharmaceutical companies that make the drugs, they have reservations about it because they're afraid that if you put 39 million seniors, including 2.7 million seniors in Florida and 5 million disabled people, if you look at all of them and a significant percentage of them get in one program, that the people buying drugs for that one program will have too much marketing power, and they'll get the drugs for too cheap.

Because what happens is, our pharmaceutical companies charge Americans more for drugs to cover all the research costs in America. Then they can sell them much, much cheaper in Canada or Mexico. You've seen all these press stories about people going there.

Now, I just think that's not a very good reason to deprive senior citizens of medicine, and I don't think it's a partisan issue outside Washington. I think out here in Tampa or in Arkansas or New York or California, nobody asks you what party you're in when you go to the drugstore to buy medicine. In Washington, it's become part of an issue because the drug companies are against providing prescription drug coverage for Medicare. It doesn't sound reasonable, but it's true.